TUITION on all Fretted Instruments is given at 54/55 Piccadilly, London, W.1.

PICKINGS

PICKINGS is posted free of charge to any address on request.

Ask other players to write to us!

ISSUED FOR BANJO, MANDOLIN AND GUITAR ENTHUSIASTS

No. 26. JUNE, JULY. 1938.

HOW TO PLAY FROM MEMORY.

By EMILE GRIMSHAW.

In the last issue of "Pickings," players of fretted instruments were advised to memorise their solos before performing them publicly. Here are a few hints that might be appreciated by readers who do not readily memorise their music.

The majority of players who decide to memorise a solo probably do so by reading the music over and over again until it is possible to play the piece more or less automatically without any reference to the printed notes. This is the longest and least reliable method.

When a player has decided that he likes a solo sufficiently well to consider it worth memorising, it is advisable to give the composition a little careful analysis. He should make a mental note of the keys; and he will probably find, moreover, that each movement can be divided into four separate sections and that the first and third sections are, if not identical, very much alike. As no tune can be played from memory on a musical instrument until it can first be heard mentally by the person who intends to play it, each movement should be studied separately.

It is not sufficiently realised by players of our instruments how very useful is this ability to hear a tune mentally; to see the music on a printed page, and hear the music in the mind without the aid of a banjo, mandolin or guitar and conversely, while mentally thinking of a well-known tune, be able to visualise the printed notes.

There is nothing particularly wonderful in this: any well-trained musician can write on paper any melody or harmony he has in his mind almost as readily as he can express himself in words. This, of course, in addition to being helpful in many other ways, is an invaluable asset to all who desire to play from memory.

The probability is that many more players would appear publicly, did they not have a constant fear that their memory might suddenly fail and that they might in consequence finish in apologetic ignominy.

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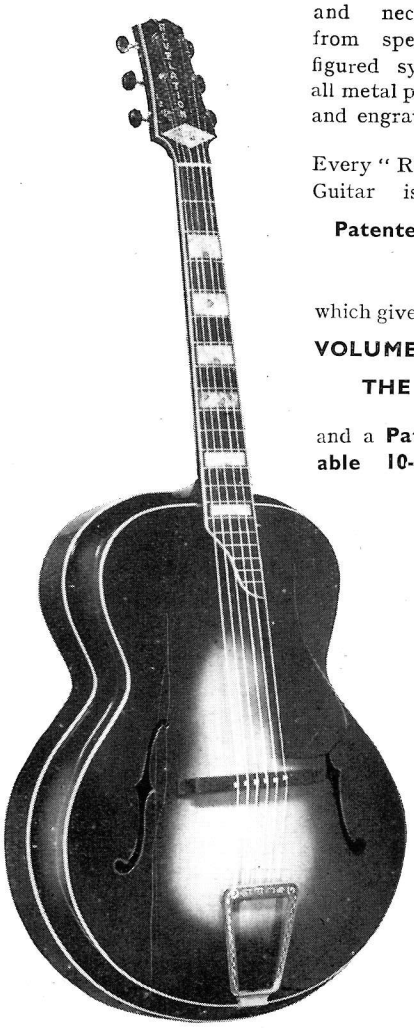

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The cure for this is to play for others as much as possible. Play for friends on the slightest excuse; let them decide which is the better of two solos or ask for opinions on the tonal merits of new strings.

Another way to acquire confidence is to practise improvisation on an instrument. Think of any tune you know, play it through from memory as written, then elaborate the melody and alter the method of filling in the harmony. This will give any player an enormous amount of self-confidence. Listen to the pianists Charlie Kunz or Billy Mayerl. It is impossible to imagine them being the least bit disconcerted if either their memory failed them or the printed music fell from the stand. There would be a score of things they might do without any listener being any the wiser.

This is not mentioned to advocate the alteration of the melody, harmony or rhythm of a solo as a general practice, but rather to show players how they may acquire confidence and, as it were, extend their musical vocabulary.

It is equivalent to the case of a public speaker who, should he forget the better and more appropriate words he first thought of, can still carry on with a choice of other words without losing his composure. * * *

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GUITAR TONE.

All musical sounds are produced by vibration, and the method of vibration is therefore the key to all good playing. Too many players produce sounds that are accurate in pitch and duration but indifferent in quality. Some instruments can stand this and still remain attractive. The guitar cannot. It is not much use being the owner of a first-class instrument unless the player knows how to produce good tone from it. Many guitarists have developed a sort of butterfly touch; they skim the surface of the strings with the plectrum and sacrifice still more tone through failing to stop the stings with sufficient pressure of the left hand fingers. The possibilities of any instrument must depend to a great extent upon the player. Guitarists can with advantage devote more attention to improving their method of vibrating the strings. There is a way of doing this with a definite incisive stoke that increases the richness and sonority of guitar tone by at least one hundred per cent. * * *

WHERE ARE THE ARTISTS?

It is a regrettable fact that the majority of fretted instrument players, including even the noted ones, play with little or no feeling. They may produce a pleasing tone, keep perfect time and play every note accurately, but the music they play is absolutely devoid of expression.

An exhibition of advanced technique may interest a certain type of audience. Banjo concert audiences, as a rule, do like to hear difficult solos played by competent artists. Unfortunately, however, the lesser lights who never have a chance to appear before a banjo audience, will persist in thinking that the non-playing public can be dazzled with the same sort of music.

There is a type of plectrum-guitarist who will play nothing but the ultra-modern style of solo.

It will invariably be found that these solos are written by a player-composer, mainly to suit himself and his own method of playing (which, of course, is a perfectly legitimate thing to do). The mistake arises when the novice erroneously imagines that successful guitar playing is dependant on this type of solo only.

Unless a banjo, mandolin or guitar is played with feeling or expression it cannot truthfully be classed as a musical instrument.

All arts are akin. A painter, writer or musician has to learn all the usual ground work and technique of his profession. If he has ability and makes good use of his time, he will become a craftsman although not necessarily an artist.

There are many who never pass beyond the craftsmanship stage. They know the ways and means; they are skilled performers but only indifferent artists because the true expression of the artist is missing.

It is regrettable that so many otherwise excellent players should lack this necessary qualification of good music.

* * *

PICKINGS.

From other Papers.

NO matter how earnest and gifted the personnel of an orchestra may be, how carefully selected the players, or how strict the attendance rules at rehearsals, the success of the club depends absolutely on the personality of the conductor. Of course he must have the best of material to work with, must be supported with enthusiasm in all his aims, given complete authority over the discipline of the club, and after that it comes down to a question of the breadth of his musicianship and that elusive quality which we call the capacity for leadership.

The Musician.

Heavenly Blue

SEE BACK PAGE

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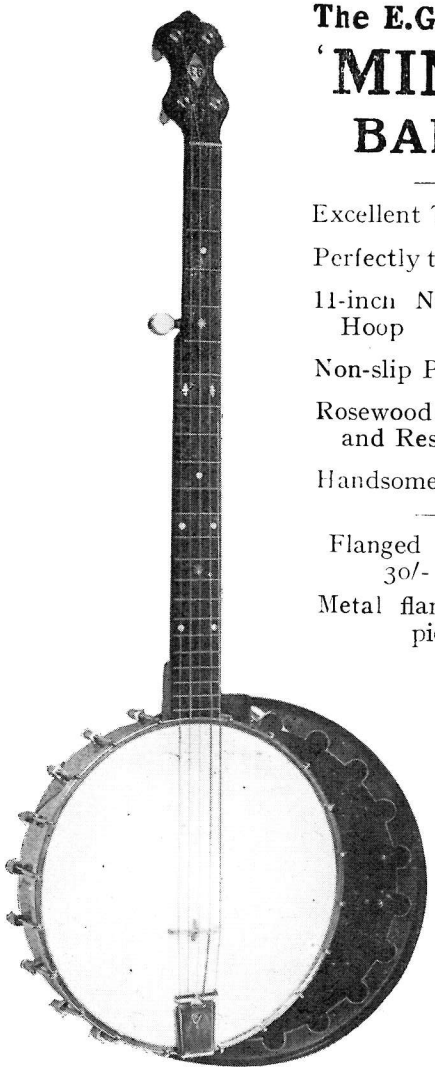

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QUARTET OPPORTUNITIES.

If players could only realise the great possibilities of our instruments when played with others of varying sizes the number of quartets would be considerably augmented. It is not every player who can hope to attain proficiency on his instrument to the extent of being able to interest an audience in solo work; nor is it every player who can hope to acquire the necessary confidence. Quartet playing not only makes it easier to interest others but also increases the opportunities for a player to interest himself, which most readers will agree is of still greater importance.

First, second and third banjos and bass-banjo or first and second mandolin, mandolin and mando-cello playing well-arranged parts provide a complete small orchestra in themselves, and pleasure and financial return await all who will rehearse assiduously.

Some advantages of the quartet are: there is no need to engage a special room for rehearsals, as is the case with a large orchestra; it is easier to produce a good balance of parts with better attack and finish; and the combination can thus be used just as efficiently at a garden party or on the river where a piano might not be available.

Teachers who give the matter a little thought will realise that a mandola, mando-cello and bass-banjo can be a very good investment if only for the purpose of letting non-players hear fretted instruments in a really effective way. These three instruments are also good for solo work; teachers should encourage pupils to study them because they are quite as useful and pleasing in their way as are the viola and 'cello.

* * *

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"SHOW BOAT" and "EVERLASTING WALTZ"

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IT IS INTERESTING TO KNOW . . .

. . . that the banjo was originally played with a plectrum or thimble. When the new method of vibrating the strings with the tips of the fingers was introduced it was called the guitar style.

* * *

. . . that by using first and second guitar parts, mandola and second mandolin parts, tremoloing the last mentioned one octave higher than written, scores of excellent guitar quartets are readily available in published form.

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. . . that fifty years ago in Kansas City, U.S.A. there were more than one hundred mandolin clubs and orchestras numbering from ten to thirty players each.

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. . . that Secretary Mr. O. Winch is in possession of programmes of public appearances made by the Aston Banjo Club for every year since its formation more than thirty years ago.

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. . . That a B., M. and G. Orchestra has just been formed at Kumasi, Gold Coast, West Africa.

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. . . that a specially arranged manuscript part for drums and various effects is now available for "Show Boat," "Everlasting Waltz" and the new number, "Martial Moments." The price is 2/6 net.

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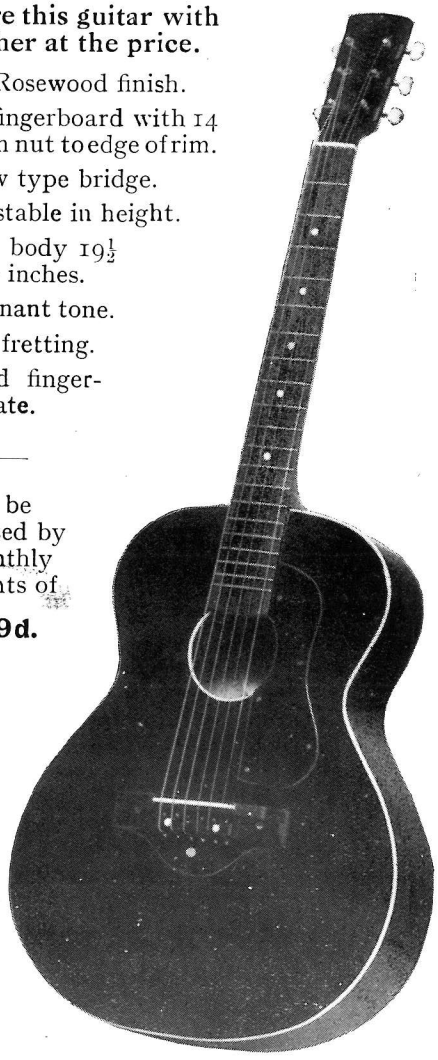

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QUERIES ANSWERED.

Fretted-Instrument queries are requested and answered by return post if a stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed. We give below a selection from the replies that have been sent to correspondents since "Pickings" was last issued, believing that they will be of interest to other players.

E. T.—If you have decided to learn a musical instrument, choose the best teacher available. In addition to being the quickest way it is also the cheapest in the end. It is worth a great deal to feel assured that the knowledge you acquire is authentic. Success usually requires one of two things: long experience or training. The first takes years, whereas instruction from a qualified expert may mean only a matter of months.

* * *

B. R.—If you can induce some friendly pianist to accompany your banjo solos, you will find such assistance of the utmost value. The addition of a piano accompaniment will not only test the accuracy of your time but also add considerably to the interest and general effect.

* * *

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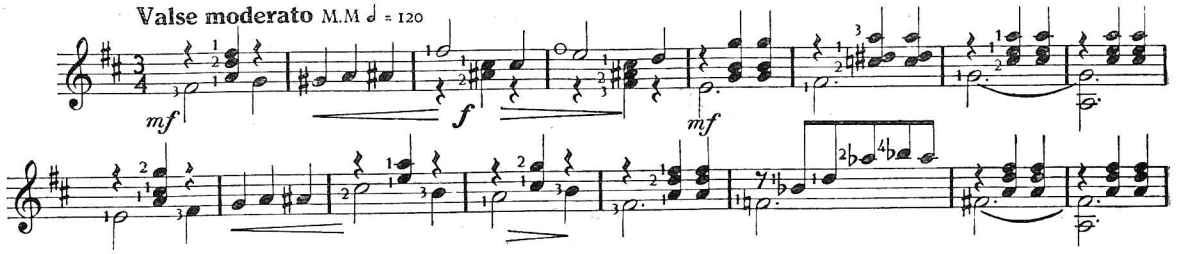
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